

Pieter Cortelyou
(b. 1665, d. 1767)
(Excerpts from *The Cortelyou Genealogy* by John Van Zandt Cortelyou)

Pieter Cortelyou was b. probably in early 1665; d. at New Utrecht, April 10, 1757; m., probably about 1691, Diewertje (or Dievertje) de Witt, who was also known as Deborah.

Two items give us clues as to the approximate date of Pieter's birth. On August 19, 1713, Peter "Cortilleau" swore that he was "aged 48 years or thereabouts," (Kings Co. Conveyances, Liber 4, p. 82). Pieter died April 10, 1757 "in the 93rd year of his age," (Johanna Cortelyou Bergen Bible Record).

Pieter Cortelyou was a man of many interests and accomplishments. Not only did he gain sufficient education from his father to meet the requirements of life at the Narrows, but it seems likely that he assisted his father in the latter's surveying activities. As early as 1696 (Land Papers, vol. II, pp. 229-30), and perhaps earlier, Pieter was making surveys and from that time on, his name occurs in records as doing work of this character at points as far away as Esopus (Kingston), N.Y. Not only did he make surveys for others, but while still a comparatively young man, he engaged in purchases and sales of real estate. Had he lived in a later generation, he might have been known as a developer of subdivisions.

Pieter spoke and wrote both Dutch and English. Quite likely in his youth he could also talk with the Indians who lingered in the vicinity of the Najack home. In a description of a survey filed at Albany, (Land Papers, vol. III, p. 69), Pieter used Dutch script in forming English works, much as a present day school boy might employ English script for writing German.

Pieter and his family occupied one half of the house on the bluff at the Narrows; his brother Jaques lived in the other end. These two brothers operated the farm on a partnership basis or else they cultivated parallel tracts. Certainly the Narrows ferry was a joint enterprise.

In addition to these interests, Pieter was a Justice of the Peace. He and Joseph Hegeman, two of his Majesty's justices of the peace, licensed Myndert Le Fevre on January 30, 1710/11 to "keep a Tavern and Common Alehouse or tippling house at Newutrecht aforsaid in the house where he now dwelleth." (ESKC, p. 178).

Later Pieter became a County Judge, being referred to as "Squire Cortelyou."

"Pieter Corteljou" took the oath of allegiance in September 1687 declaring that he was a native of New Netherland.

Pieter is mentioned several times in Book No. 2, Conveyances, Kings County as reprinted in the N.Y.G. and B. Record, 1929. These cover the period from 1695 to 1703 and refer to him as a witness to documents or otherwise. On October 28, 1697, he is called "Peter Cortelyou, the surveyor."

On February 14, 1701/2, an agreement was recorded covering the town lines between New Utrecht and Brooklyn. This was signed for New Utrecht by Major Cornelius Van Brunt, Peter Cortelyou, and Aert Van Pelt. For Brooklyn the signers were Captain George Hansen, Jacob Hansen, and Cornelius Van Duyne. (Conveyances, Kings County, Bk. 2, p. 232; N.Y.G. & B. Record, 1923, p. 312).

On October 14, 1702, Pieter was appointed Justice of the Peace in Kings County (Conveyances, Bk. 2, p. 245/7).

In 1701, Pieter journeyed for a hundred miles up the Hudson River to make a survey for Mattys (Matthias) DeMott, at Esopus, Ulster County. The tract contained 710 acres. After completing his work, Pieter prepared a draft and description under date of December 10, 1701. These are filed at Albany. (Land Papers, vol. III, p. 20).

On March 28, 1704, Pieter was appointed, together with Joseph Hegeman and Benjamin van de Water, by the General Assembly of the Colony of New York, as a Commissioner to lay out the main road, or King's Highway, through Breuckelen, now Fulton Street and Fulton Avenue. (Stiles' History).

It is not believed that Pieter ever left Kings County to live in New Jersey, but active interest in the Somerset-Middlesex County section apparently began with him, unless, indeed, his father Jaques had noticed the possibilities of this region and, perhaps, talked about it to his sons.

Transactions involving the purchase of Somerset County lands by Dutch residents of Kings County, Long Island, occurred mainly during the period from 1699 to 1710. The buying was at first done by groups and the details are not always easy to follow.

In 1699, Pieter joined with Gerrit Claes Vechten and George Willocks in purchasing from the Proprietors 3,000 acres on the east side of the Millstone River, extending

from Griggstown toward Franklin Park (Six Mile Run) and Ten Mile Run. (SCHQ, vol. 6, p. 159).

In 1701, Pieter Cortelyou joined with Stoffel Probasco, Theodore Polhemus, Dennis Tunis, and Cornelius Wyckoff in buying the "Harrison Tract." This was an area of 10,000 acres in Franklin Township, Somerset County. The tract extended from the Raritan lots on the north to a line running east-and-west to the Indian Path on the east. It was later divided into eight numbered parts. (Proceedings N.J. Historical Society, 1927, p.347)

Similarly, about 1710, Pieter, with others of Kings County, bought the "Harlingen Tract, " in Somerset County.

As a surveyor, Pieter must have taken a keen interest in these New Jersey purchases. And quite possibly, Pieter made visits to Somerset County after his nephew Hendrick and other friends and relatives from Long Island were established in their new homes.

In the Two Hundreth Anniversary booklet of the New Utrecht Reformed Church, Pieter is listed as having been a Elder in 1715, 1724-5, and 1730. (New York Public Library).

Pieter outlived all his brothers and sisters. Though his life had been an active one, it was not until he reached his ninety-third year that he succumbed to the infirmities of age, only six months prior to the death of his son Jaques. He was one of the boys mentioned by the Labadists. With his brother, he acted as ferryman at the Narrows for half a century. As a surveyor, he had a hand in laying out new tracts which meant expansion for the growing colony. From his home on the bluff at Najack he saw the canoes of the redmen and the ships of Holland replaced by British trading ships and men-of-war. He could have undoubtedly told many tales which would have fitted into this family chronicle.